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## Editor's Perspective

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## Editor's Perspective

THE TWO FEATURE ARTICLES in this issue may seem to represent an odd pairing: an article on an official tour in 1906 of newly placed monuments on Civil War battlefields and a Southern Civil War prisoner-of-war camp is followed by an article on Black Panthers in Des Moines in the late 1960s. It is my hope that reading both articles together may spark for some readers some reflections that go beyond what either article on its own might provoke.

As we approach the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War, it is instructive (as I wrote in one of these columns for a special Civil War issue in 2007) to recall how Iowans commemorated the war a century ago. While nearly everyone agreed that the war and the soldiers who fought in it should be memorialized, there was not, as William Lowe points out in his article in this issue, universal agreement about the meaning that should be attached to the memorials. In general, however, there was a tendency — in the interest of sectional reconciliation — to minimize the issue of race when reflecting on the meaning of the war.

That failure to deal adequately with matters of race left a troubling legacy — one that continued to haunt the nation, and particularly its urban centers, throughout the remainder of the twentieth century and beyond. For most of the century, voices from African American institutions such as the NAACP and black churches had advocated for civil rights. But, as Bruce Fehn and Robert Jefferson show in their article in this issue on the Black Panther Party in Des Moines, even Iowa's cities were not exempt from the upheaval that emerged in the 1960s when more radical voices expressed impatience with the failure to make substantive progress in the struggle to address the nation's racial problems.

The election of a biracial president — an election given a significant boost by Iowa's prominent role in the presidential

campaign — has not ended America's long conversation about race, even if some think it has (while others hope that it could be the beginning of a more honest, more fruitful conversation). It is my hope that the two articles in this issue of the *Annals of Iowa* can make a small contribution to that ongoing conversation.

—Marvin Bergman, editor